

**TOWN OF WEST HARTFORD PUBLIC HEARING
MARCH 27, 2017**

PROPOSED FISCAL YEAR 2017-18 BUDGET

President Cantor: All right. We're calling the public hearing to order, sorry about that. So this is the Public Hearing on the Fiscal Year 2017-18 Fiscal Year Budget as proposed by the Town Manager and Superintendent of Schools. These are the rules of the Public Hearing. If you are a resident or taxpayer and you would like to speak at tonight's Public Hearing on the Town Budget, please sign in with your name and address. And we have a signup sheet here but I think there's another one over there, yes, and you will have three minutes to speak. If you are speaking on behalf of a group, you will have five minutes. The microphone is voice-activated so just start speaking and the Town Council Clerk, Essie Labrot, will alert you when your time is up. If you are not a taxpayer or resident, please tell us so that we may entertain a motion to suspend the rules to allow you to speak. We will start calling names so you can be aware of the order and we can, I will call the name of the person and the person on-deck. One thing before we do that, the roll call...we also, as the Town Council, we have, we have control of the line item amount of the Board of Education budget. We do not have program jurisdiction over the program, the individual programs just so you are aware of that. Okay. Roll call, Ms. Labrot.

Ms. Labrot: Mr. Barnes?

Councilor Barnes: Present.

Ms. Labrot: Ms. Cantor?

President Cantor: Here.

Ms. Labrot: Ms. Casperson?

Councilor Casperson: Here.

Ms. Labrot: Mr. Davidoff?

Vice-President Davidoff: Here.

Ms. Labrot: Mr. Dodge?

Councilor Dodge: Here.

Ms. Labrot: Ms. Hall?

Councilor Hall: Here.

Ms. Labrot: Ms. Kerrigan?

Councilor Kerrigan: Here.

Ms. Labrot: Mr. Wenograd?

Councilor Wenograd: Here.

Ms. Labrot: And Mr. Williams?

Councilor Williams: Here.

President Cantor: Okay. We don't really have a presentation because we already had done that and I don't know if, Mr. Van Winkle, if you want to say anything as a quick summary?

Mr. Van Winkle: No. I think we'll just go. There, there is a budgeted brief on the table over here for people to read, and we did our budget presentations prior.

President Cantor: Yeah. And that is online if anybody needs that information. So we will start with the signup sheet. The first person that I have and I apologize if I mispronounce your name because they're a little small for me, Jim Bouchard is up and then on deck is Joseph Grynbaum. Don't forget to state your name and your address.

Mr. Bouchard: My name is Jim Bouchard. I live at 1 Colton Road, West Hartford. I'm a little tall, but that's okay. I've been a resident for 27 years. I love this town, and quite honestly, I'm hoping that I can afford to live here for at least another 20 years. In the last 11 years, my property taxes have increased by almost 45 percent and that does not include this proposal. I know there are extreme circumstances that we are dealing with this year, but the bottom line is we have to control our spending. We cannot continue to raise our taxes to solve our budget issues. If this budget is approved and in my home I average a 3 percent increase for the next 10 years, my taxes are going to increase by another 45 percent. A couple of weeks ago when I read about the budget in the paper, it talked about included in this budget we may have to close a library and possibly one of the senior centers. Our seniors are the ones that have made this town what it is today, and with this budget, it's appalling to me that we cannot afford to keep a senior center open with this kind of increase that we're proposing. How many of you have ever volunteered to feed lunch to the seniors in our town? I have. I did it for four months. I was unemployed and it made me realize, even though this town has a lot of money, there are a lot of people here that need services, including our seniors. They not only appreciate it, they've earned that right to have that service, and they deserve it. Our property taxes are considerably higher than our neighboring towns; Avon, Farmington, Simsbury, and Glastonbury. If we continue with these tax increases, not only are we going to force people out of this town, but the desirability for others to move to West Hartford will certainly decline. You know, it seemed like it was yesterday but about 10 years ago, Blue Back Square, we had many meetings, and one of the selling points about Blue Back Square, it was, it was going to improve our tax base. Unfortunately, my property tax bill doesn't look like that. We are also with these budgets having difficulty maintaining our services. Something is wrong and we need to fix it. We can't spend, spend, and spend. And I know within this budget there are things that have been given to us out of our control, but we still have to look at our spend, go back to the department heads, and we need to come up with a more sensible budget so all of us in this room and this town can afford to live here. We need to make difficult decisions, but that's quite honestly what we got paid to do. There may have to be some layoffs, wage freezes, and possible union concessions, but I ask the Town Council and everyone involved to please re-look at this budget and make it affordable for the residents of West Hartford. Thank you.

President Cantor: Thank you, Mr. Bouchard. Joseph Grynbaum?

Mr. Grynbaum: I, I will not be speaking tonight.

President Cantor: Thank you, Mr. Grynbaum. Vincent Staunton, 101 Emily.

Mr. Staunton: You talked me into speaking.

President Cantor: Well, that's good.

Mr. Staunton: I live at 101 Emily Way. I'm a resident of West Hartford since 1967. I immigrated from Ireland here and had a wonderful career in really large corporations in technology. But I'm here tonight to represent myself and the community consisting of the 78 villas and 108 apartments in the Promenades. I've done an awful lot of analysis, being a tech

guy, and when you look at the increase in the assessments and you add, tack on the mill rate, we're talking in the neighborhood for the use of the Promenade buildings alone, 20 to 25 percent increase in their taxes. On the Villas, it's closer to 30 percent. Now, we have a lot of people that're out of town. It's a retirement community. We're probably the least burden on this town with respect to school systems, road maintenance, sewers, whatever, okay? And yet we're going to be hit the hardest, and obviously, we oppose this budget. Now, we understand, I've been to the Assessor's office, I know how the assessments are completed. The mill rate is going to be based on the, the State impact, the teachers. And I have to tell you, I was, we had our baby in 1973 and my wife worked for one of the corporations. When, when she was pregnant and had the kid, she didn't, she lost her job. There were no benefits. This town has a, an enormous amount of programs for the schools. They attended The Academy meeting a few weeks ago with respect to the State budget and all I heard was from teachers and all I heard was from the millennials. And I'm sorry to say this but, you know, we're at the point now where I think this town is ready to offer pre-kindergarten care, babysitting, so I think it's time for people to look at the services this town offers and maybe it has to be an a la carte, whatever. People need to pay for what they get, and I don't think that the retirements communities can afford to do that. And with that, I obviously oppose the Town budget. Thank you very much. I appreciate your time.

President Cantor: Thank you. The next person up is Bruce Grower and after that, Maria Hogan.

Mr. Grower: Hello, my name is Bruce Grower, and I live at 50 Brightview Drive. One of the ways that we could end up saving a lot of money would be if the State of Connecticut got a state bank. North Dakota is the only state bank in the country, and they borrow money basically at 0 percent because they don't have to pay creditors who are basically bond holders. And there's different cities in the U.S. that're also exploring getting either state bank or like or Citibank, for instance in Philadelphia. That would save us a lot of money. There's a woman whose name is Ellen Brown and she wrote information on this, so it's not like its some idea. It is happening and it would definitely save us a lot of money. Other things that would save us money is, before when West Hartford said that they were going to get Blue Back Square and put a lot of businesses in West Hartford to save us a lot of money, it seems like what happened was, by getting all these different businesses, it raised the property values of residents in West Hartford, and with the higher property values, we have higher property taxes. So it really didn't help us out at all. Basically by putting more businesses here and increasing the property values, you're just driving more and more people out of West Hartford. Another thing is I don't know how this would work, I know this is just the City of West Hartford and it's the State of Connecticut that contracted the MDC, but if somehow we could get in touch with maybe some of the different state legislators and see if we can get rid of this semi-public/private organization, MDC, and just get a public organization because they don't have our best interests in mind and there's no reason that we should be paying millions of dollars for the incompetence of the people in Hartford not being able to pay their bills. I'm sure everyone feels the same way since on the budget sheet that you guys have, what is it, like a 26 percent budgeted increase because potentially we have to pay for the City of Hartford? And also, I attended another hearing where they talked about the potential of us having to pay a lot more money in the future for trash. One way that we might be able to save some money would be if we could have trash pickup once every two weeks instead of every week. And I don't know how this format originally came about, but it would really be helpful if instead of us just saying different ideas and everyone at the Council listening, if there

could be time for after each speaker spoke, that the Council could answer some of the questions that we have. That way we could have interaction instead of basically just having a monologue where people like me just speak. And as far as, another speaker also spoke about schools, and I also feel the same way, too. It's great that West Hartford has a really good school system, but because the costs are increasing so fast, couldn't there be some type of cost that we could control with the schools? Like it's great that a lot of the students are into sports and different things like that, but could they start funding it where maybe they end up selling candy or whatever just to start raising the money because a lot of the people here who are senior citizens and living on fixed incomes, it's just becoming more and more challenging for us to have to pay for parents who have kids in school that want more and more different types of programs. If we had a lot of money, I'd say, great, let's do it, but at this point, we need to really cut down on expenses. And it seems like the schools are one of our chief costs that we really need to control. Thank you.

President Cantor: Thank you, Mr. Grower. Maria Hogan next. Thank you very much. Robert Kennedy, and after Mr. Kennedy, Fred and Karen Boyd.

Mr. Kennedy: Good evening, Madam Mayor, members of the Town Council. My name is Robert Kennedy. I live at 65 Cassandra Boulevard, Unit 101. I'm here not only as a resident but I was asked by Phil Walker, who is Chair of the Senior Citizens Advisory Committee for the town, to address the Council. The message is relatively simple – when you're making your decisions, especially at a very difficult time which is not of your making, but you're stuck with, the, the process, keep in mind the seniors. As Vincent Staunton mentioned, at 1401, the apartment-style condominiums have gone up roughly 20 to 25 percent, huge increase for seniors. And I'm concerned that an equal amount is being experienced by seniors in the Town of West Hartford no matter where they live. So please keep that in mind because that's, they're fixed, generally fixed income, and they certainly want to maintain their residence in West Hartford. They enjoy the community and they contribute to the community. On the flip side of that, which makes your job that much more difficult, is on some of the cuts that were proposed, one was closing the Senior Citizen Center at Bishops Corner, eliminating Dial-a-Ride, that type of thing. I know most of you are well-aware of the programs at the senior citizen centers. If you're not, take a look at the seniors' bulletin or go to an open house. They do a tremendous job. Its seniors supporting seniors. A lot of volunteers are making those centers viable and provide a needed service to them. The seniors are getting hit in a number of different ways. CRT has cut back on the meals at the, at the senior centers as well as capping the number of meals. On a federal level, Meals on Wheels, are, are threatened with closure, so there's a lot of activity that is negative to the seniors in the community, and I want to make sure that as you go through your process, please keep them in mind. Thank you.

President Cantor: Thank you, Mr. Kennedy. Fred and Karen Boyd, do you want to speak or?

Mr. Boyd: No, I thought it was just a sign-in.

President Cantor: Okay. No problem. Gary Muldoon, and after Gary, I have Emmett, Emmett, I don't, on Cassandra Boulevard.

Mr. Muldoon: My name is Gary Muldoon and I live at 94 LedgeWood Road. I went to the meeting the other day, last week when we had our state reps, and everybody got up there and talked about how they want to save their programs. They seemed to be missing the point. The State is a mess. The State is a freaking mess. I mean, we're rated as one of the worst states, the worst state by many, by many as the worst financial and, and the worst financial in the, in the country. And that's the point. Now, and Shari Cantor says, well, we don't want to have a, a town against town but it is town against town. It's program against program. And, and why did it get this way? Because we've dropped the ball. We need to go back and, and start rethinking about government all together, you know, because and, and one girl says, yeah, she got up and said, well, people don't want to pay taxes. We're already paying the highest taxes. How, how bad, how much worse can it get? And, and then people say, I'm not a rich person so I'm not, I shouldn't be talking for rich people, but they said make the rich, the rich pay their fair share. They are paying their fair share. And, and if, and you can't soak them because they're going to just move out of, they're going to move out of state. That's what they're doing. They're going to move right out of state. And the, the, with the jobs and everything else, that's what's going to happen. That's what's been happening because we've been dropping the ball. And, and all you have to do, and you wouldn't mind, but there's so many scammy things going on in the State. All you have to do is look at that, the app for the pensions, \$2- and \$300,000 pensions? How'd that ever get through? Who gets a \$200,000 or \$300,000 pension? Why'd that ever get through? And, and even, and I have to say it, because it hits close to home, our own, ex-Town Manager, Barry Feldman. He got up there, he's making \$260,000 and I don't mind that, even though he's making \$113,000 pension from us, \$260,000 as one of the many, many Vice Presidents. And that's another scam. Our own State Universities, they're money-making operations. That's what they are. Everything in this State is a money-making operation. Yeah, they do good, they do, they provide services, but they're also making a ton of money, these people. We have to go back and rethink government all together right from...and as far as, and as far as, you know, our own town is concerned, you see it, massive overtime. All kinds of overtime. You got a lieutenant who made half a million dollars in two years. Does anybody think that's wrong, something wrong with that? I do. And I, I, somebody put that on the front page of the paper. I didn't do it, you know? Why do we, what do we have two years to negotiate a contract with the Fire Department. Why? Because our State legislator said, oh, that's okay. You can do that. No. What purpose does that serve? I mean, there're so many scammy things going on in this state it's not even funny and they, and they come out every once in a while and, and you hear about them but they don't even, we probably don't even hear about a lot of the other things. But like I said, all you do is look at some of those pensions, and then on top of that, they're going to get raises on those pensions and they're going to get benefits with those pensions? Are you kidding me? We have to go back and rethink and start redoing government in, in general, you know? And like I said, yes, we have some big expenses and I think we should just cut right from, you know, the Police Department, the Fire Department, and the seniors. Everybody's going to take, the schools, everybody's going to take a hit. That's the fair way to do it. But we can't, we can't just keep on raising taxes because we know now, we know now we're driving people out and businesses, too. So...my time's not up yet? Okay. That's all I've got to say.

President Cantor: Thank you, Mr. Muldoon. Okay. Emmett, so I apologize if I can't, Emmett, Mr., can, yeah, make sure you state your name and address.

Mr. McTeague: Keep my name a secret. Emmett McTeague from Cassandra Boulevard in, in, out off Farmington Avenue. I'm not going to repeat everything that, especially the first two speakers said most of what I'm thinking. I just would add to that I was born and raised in West Hartford and just recently moved back from spending 15 years in Rhode Island, which as you know, had one of the highest rates of corruption anywhere and the Controller down there took charge of, of a lot of the pension programs, did a heck of a job. She's now Governor. And she just persisted and stuck with the numbers and got reduction in so many costs, and I think did the citizens of Rhode Island a huge favor. And it, I don't know whether I can say it paid off for her because she's Governor that seems more of a burden. But I think that's the thing we're all looking for now is is there some way for you to find ways to get costs down so that we especially as seniors can just maintain ourselves and, and continue to do well in this environment because we love West Hartford. It's, I've enjoyed it so much being back after being in Rhode Island as much as I enjoyed the Rhode Island beaches. But I thank you for your consideration.

President Cantor: Thank you, Mr. McTeague. Is that how you said it? Mr.?

Mr. McTeague: Yes.

President Cantor: Yeah, thank you. That is the end of our sign-up sheet. So if you would like to speak on behalf of, you know, I mean, either on behalf of a group or by, for yourself, you can come up and state your name and address and...that's all the, oh, there's another, more sheet. Thank you, Ron. Okay, I have Krishna Adhikari.

Mr. Adhikari: Good evening. My name is Krishna Adhikari. Actually, this is the first time I'm here, and I saw this year's budget, and I'm interested to speak something about the budget. I have some observations. This, my presentation is different than previous speakers. I went through the budget, just the small summary. I didn't have, I didn't go to the big budget. I saw some of the budget for which I am concerned about the proposed budget. First of all, my point is reduced police overtime, I read that non-core programs. Actually, I love West Hartford. I have been here for 13 years and this is the 14th year, and this is the safest city and a nice city. Everybody loves to live in this city and we feel secure in the city. And I think that if we're going to reduce the police presence and if we cut the budget for the police, I don't know without hiring new police officers how do we get the security, extra security, and mobility of the police? I'm concerned about that one and the, I propose we have to have the security because I walk alone myself at 9:00 at night and I feel secure and I don't feel any insecurity in my walking. So we want to be in the situation in what we have today and we want to be secure and we all, we like, we want to, we need our property safe, we need our lives safe, and we need our neighborhoods safe. Second, I saw the trash picking up is going to eliminate from 2017, October 1st. Yeah, we are West Hartford residents and we pay taxes to the town so that we are receiving the services from the town as our garbage collection, leaf collections, and extra services. Okay. However, in the Town Manager's present budget proposal, the town is going to eliminate the trash picking system from October 1, 2017, that is are these services going to be privatized? West Hartford residents are paying increasing property taxes every year, and if trash picking going to run by the private sector, that's another additional cost for the residents. Can the residents pay all these taxes in addition to the increasing property tax? Is the town thinking about lower income families or the middle income families or the immigrants moving from out of this state in this

city? They love this city. Can they live here in these situations? I'm concerned about this. And my proposal is please keep the trash collection as-is and we should be resume this by the town. Second, education, most important part. I saw that the library is closing. We have three libraries and they are doing extremely good job and we are getting extraordinary services from the libraries. But I don't know the Bishops Corner. I live in the east part on the Elmwood side of this town, but definitely it should be the, everybody loving that library, too. To provide the quality and excellent services to the residents, public libraries are one of the most effective institutions. If Bishops Corner Library is closed down as proposed in the budget, then traffic will be more on the main library, and finding parking places at the West Hartford Center is not easy. Everybody knows that. And the really accessible parking for the library use is the parking garage and validating parking tickets at the library. The budget proposed eliminating validating these parking tickets and the new hours at the library. So that means it's still harder to go to the main library due to closing one branch and parking problems at the main library. The residents will not have access to a library as they do now. Are we going to reduce the services, what we are giving presently to the residents? This is the most important questions to rethink about this closing of the branches. So my recommendation is not closing down the Bishops Corner Library and continue with validating the parking at least for the library, two hours, one hour, whatever. Right now, right now it's two hours. Second, that, this is the fourth.

President Cantor: Your time is up so if you could just wind it up, that would be appreciated.

Mr. Adhikari: Can I get two more, more points, I have a group.

President Cantor: Okay. Oh, yes. Okay. I have a group.

Mr. Adhikari: My group, anybody else speaking? No. Okay. Closing West Hartford Senior Center, I'm almost a senior. My concern is do we have enough senior centers in West Hartford for the seniors to live in, do we have? If this closing will not affect the seniors living now and in the future and if they have, enough living provisions then it's not a problem for me. If the seniors will be suffer from the closing that, that will not be fair to the senior citizens. The town has to take care of the citizens. Fifth, the Town of West Hartford is one of the towns, which welcomes all sorts of people from around the world. We are a welcoming city. This is a welcoming town. People love to live in this town. However, due to expensive nature of business and its services and higher property taxes, it is hard to live, believe that the middle income people can live in this town in future. I'm rethinking whether we're going to be here or not. Can we stay in these situations, taxes increasing? If the garbage is going to privatize and everything's, the price is going up so the middle income and the lower income people will be suffer and will not be affordable to live in this town.

President Cantor: Thank you, Mr...

Mr. Adhikari: Finally...okay. Finally, the town needs to find something, alternatives to get the budget like making some source of income like welcoming new business, making tourist friendly towns and cutting costs of, on the non-productive sectors. So I would like to thank you for giving me a few minutes to speak. Thank you so much.

President Cantor: Thank you, Mr. Adhikari. Okay so that is part of that is the last person that signed up on the sheets. If you would like to come up and speak, you have three minutes. State your name and address.

Mr. Boyd: Frankly, I'd just like to ask a rhetorical question.

President Cantor: Can you just state your name and address for the record? Thank you so much.

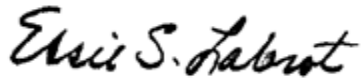
Mr. Boyd: Oh, I'm sorry. It's Frederick Boyd, 65 Cassandra. As I said, I'd like to ask a rhetorical question. Who's bright idea it was to get rid of county governments? I'm from St. Louis. In 1840, St. Louis had the bright idea they didn't want to deal with all those rules out in, out in the farm country so they took themselves out of St. Louis County and they've been paying the price ever since. It's an industrial town. It's lost manufacturing jobs, etc. It never was able to expand and it's surrounded, hemmed in by 95 suburbs and many of them don't have, have any reason to exist alone. They've been fighting each other, talking about merging, but they never can seem to quite do it and they keep going at it. They have all already taken over, no, they haven't taken over. What they've done is join with St. Louis to keep the forest park and the zoo going because it's a regional attraction. But as I said before, maybe somebody can answer that question, why did you get rid of county governments? The Mayor's thought about it and rejected it. That's one of your biggest problems.

President Cantor: Thank you, Mr. Boyd. Is there anybody else that would like to speak to the budget?

Ms. Grynbaum: My name is Pat Grynbaum. I live on 28 Banbury Lane. I'm here representing a library group, the New Yorker Magazine Discussion Group, and I've something to read. We're, we're concerned about the budget reduction option to eliminate parking validation at the library. We are very grateful to participate in a public forum to discuss the budget. Our group has had a total attendance of over 2,000 people during the past three years, averaging 18 to 30 participants every week. The meeting's funded by a private bequest to the library, are open to the public, and completely self-run with 20 different members so far volunteering to moderate. Our meeting has been called a signature cultural community resource of which West Hartford can be proud. We fear that eliminating parking validation will begin a downward cycle of decreased participation at library programs such as ours. Many people, especially those with young children, retired people, volunteer tutors and their students, anyone on a limited budget might no longer be able to enjoy the many programs and services at Noah Webster. They would have to pay a parking fee for every visit. When the development of Blue Back Square eliminated the free lot behind the public library, the town publicly declared its commitment and its promise to maintain free parking for library patrons, which is why you have the two-hour parking validation in the parking garages. No public library in comparable Connecticut towns charges patrons for parking. And we as taxpayers support the public library, we shouldn't have to pay an extra fee to use it. I hope you will take this into consideration. And as you all know, a huge percentage of the West Hartford community uses the library. And please consider your decision to take away the free parking for the library. Thank you.

President Cantor: Thank you, Mrs. Grynbaum. Anybody else who would like to speak? No. Okay. Then we are closing the Public Hearing.

Public Hearing closed at 6:37 P.M.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Essie S. Labrot".

Essie S. Labrot
Town Clerk/Council Clerk

ESL/dd